

Just Jovial John – an appreciation of John Alliston

JOHN WIBBERLEY



John Alliston was a real star; always fair-minded and full of good humour. I first met John over forty years ago. What you saw in John was what you got – an open smile, great sense of fun, good listening and genuine friendliness. He wore his scholarship lightly but sustained a wide-ranging applied research and teaching involvement. He first graduated in Agriculture at the University of Aberdeen. I guess John won his management credentials as Farm Manager & Head of Farms at the Institute of Grassland & Animal Production, which was then near Reading, having previously lectured at Cirencester after gaining his PhD. When I gave 12-months' notice to leave The Royal Agricultural College Cirencester in 1988, I was delighted when John succeeded me in July 1989 as Head of Agriculture. He was subsequently appointed Professor of Agriculture there in 2000, and stayed until his retirement in 2011, though continuing with part-time involvement until his death.

John's focal research interests were in livestock production from grass and forage crops. His Nuffield Scholarship in 1986-7 featured studies of white clover in New Zealand and Australia. He subsequently chaired the Maize Development Association in the UK, gained a Waitangi Scholarship (Fellowship) to NZ and developed his work on Agricultural Leadership further through a Nuffield Jubilee Scholarship. John led many Advanced Agricultural Business Management short courses of the London-based Worshipful Company of Farmers & Institute of Agricultural Management - for some 18 candidates per course. He led many Management Development Scheme courses for the John Edgar Trust. He gained the *Farmers Weekly* Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016. John's balanced interests across the spectrum of practical agriculture were reflected in his awards of

Fellowships – of the Institute of Agricultural Management (FIAGR); of the Institution of Agricultural Engineers (FIAgrE), and Fellowship of the Royal Agricultural Societies (FRAGS) which he attained in 1992 for outstanding work, having been awarded Associateship in 1988.

John Alliston was passionate to see people developed and skilled in agricultural management, and served IFMA with distinction as our President from 2009-2013. He was chosen in 2014 by Lord Plumb (a past President of the NFU, and of the European Parliament from 1987-1990) as the first Chairman of the Henry Plumb Foundation for mentoring and enabling young entrepreneurs, a post he discharged with characteristic enthusiasm while engendering good teamwork.

In all of his work and considerable achievements, John's ever cheerful face was never far from a slightly mischievous grin! He never took himself too seriously. For instance, no IFMA Congress was complete without John sneaking off for a round of golf with JJ Harty! Ireland's recent defeat of England was tempered by John's delight that England were overall winners of the Six Nations – a fact John would have enjoyed reciting within earshot of Murrayfield at IFMA21 in Scotland! He consistently supported Southampton's football team *The Saints*, and savoured their victories.

John was a real 'people person', an encourager with a ready wit – but always kindly. He was not overfond of undue bureaucracy nor of excessive technology; he once told me he thought that 'www' meant the wonderful world of Wibberley! All of us who knew John miss him and salute the enormous contributions he made, not least to our IFMA (International Farm Management Association). Our thoughts and prayers are very much with his dear wife Petey, their sons Michael and James, and their wider family.